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WHY FRANCE WANTS ALSACE-LORRAINE

BY

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"The wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871, in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, should be righted in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all . . ."

—WOODROW WILSON
President of the United States

WHY FRANCE WANTS ALSACE-LORRAINE

A FRENCH Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Louis Barthou, has condensed into three words the French terms of peace. "We want," said Mr. Barthou, restoration, reparations, guarantees."

The restoration naturally implies the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, as well as the return of the departments of Ardennes and Meuse. Between the territories occupied for forty months and the territories occupied for forty years, there is in the French mind no difference. They belong to France in the same manner; they are dear to France in the same degree. And this is the first thing that one must well understand if he speaks of Alsace-Lorraine.

When France demands Alsace-Lorraine, she does not do so because she will have some more departments in her geographical configuration, but because these territories belonged to France during centuries and centuries, because they were taken from France by force forty-seven years ago, because the people of these territories not only were never consulted, but also protested against Prussian domination—because, in a word, it is a question of right.

An Historical Untruth

In a speech, which he delivered on the 24th of January, 1918, before the Reichstag, Count von Hertling, the Imperial German Chancellor, expressed himself as follows:

"Alsace-Lorraine comprises, as is known, for the most part purely German regions which by a century long of violence and illegality were severed from the German Empire, until finally in 1779 the French Revolution swallowed up the last remnant. Alsace and Lorraine then became French provinces. When in the war of 1870, we demanded back the district which had been criminally wrested from us, that was not a conquest of foreign territory but, rightly and properly speaking, what to-day is called dis-annexation."

It is doubtful that Count von Hertling will ever leave in history the memory of a great Chancellor; but, if he does, it will be no doubt in the History of Ignorance and Falsehood. Never has a statesman in so few words uttered with such impudence so many untruths!

Historically speaking, there are in Alsace-Lorraine three parts: there is Lorraine, there is Alsace, and there is the southern part of Alsace including the town of Mulhouse.

Regarding the town of Mulhouse, the ques-

tion is most simple and clear. The town never, at any time, belonged to Germany or to the Germans. It belonged to Switzerland and, at the end of the 18th century, during the French revolution, the town after a referendum, decided to become French. A delegation was sent to Paris, to the French Parliament, then called the *Conseil des Cinq-Cents*, and the delegation expressed publicly, officially, the desire of Mulhouse to be part of the French territory. There was a deliberation, and unanimously the *Conseil des Cinq-Cents* voted a motion couched in the following terms: "The French Republic accepts the vow of the citizens of Mulhouse."

A few weeks later the French authorities, among scenes of unparalleled enthusiasm, made their entry into the town, and the flag of Mulhouse was wrapped up in a tricolor box bearing the inscription: "The Republic of Mulhouse rests in the bosom of the French Republic."

A Curious Sentence

Alsace—the rest of Alsace—became French in 1648, more than two centuries before the war of 1870. It became French according to a treaty. The treaty was signed by the Austrian Emperor, because Alsace belonged to the Austrian Imperial Family. And it is not without interest to quote a sentence of the treaty:

The Emperor cedes to the King of France forever, *in perpetuum*, without any reserve, with full jurisdiction and sovereignty, all the Alsatian territory. The Austrian Emperor gives it to the King of France in such a way that no other Emperor, in the future, will ever have any power in any time to affirm any right on these territories.

When to-day one reads that treaty, one has the impression that more than two centuries ago the Austrian Emperor had already a sort of apprehension that later on another Emperor would interfere in the matter and create mischief!

Fifty-three years after that treaty, the Germans felt sorry to have given up Alsace to France and tried to recover it. Their own ambassador tried to dissuade them, and in 1701 Count Schmettau, ambassador of Prussia in Paris, wrote to his king:

"We cannot take back Alsace, because it is well known that her inhabitants are more French than the Parisians. . . ."

Could anything answer better the affirma-

tion that "Alsations are of German tendency"?

Lorraine became French in 1552, more than three centuries before the war of 1870. Lorraine became French not after a war and as the result of a conquest, but according to a treaty signed by all the Protestant Princes of Germany, in which we find the following sentence, which is really worthy of meditation: "We find just that the King of France, the most promptly as possible, takes possession of the towns of Toul, Metz, and Verdun, where the German language has never been used." So that the Germans themselves put on the same line the towns of Metz, Toul, and Verdun, and recognized that the town of Metz was not German.

All this is extremely simple and clear. What happened several centuries later is equally clear.

The Protestations of 1871 and 1874

When, in 1871, on February 16th, the deputies of Alsace-Lorraine learned that their provinces would be given up to Germany, they assembled, and in an historical document which was signed by all of them—there were 36—they protested in the following terms:

"Alsace and Lorraine cannot be alienated. To-day, before the whole world, they proclaim that they want to remain French. Europe cannot allow or ratify the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. Europe cannot allow a people to be seized like a flock of sheep. Europe cannot remain deaf to the protest of a whole population. Therefore, we declare in the name of our population, in the name of our children and of our descendants, that we are considering any treaty which gives us up to a foreign power as a treaty null and void, and we will eternally revindicate the right of disposing of ourselves and of remaining French."

And, three years later, in January, 1874, when for the first time Alsace and Lorraine had to elect deputies, they reiterated the same protest. They elected 15 new deputies; some were Protestants, some were Catholics, one of them was the Bishop of Strassburg, but they unanimously signed a declaration which was read at the Tribune of the German Reichstag. The declaration was the following:

"In the name of all the people of Alsace-Lorraine, we protest against the abuse of force of which our country is a victim. . . . Citizens having a soul and an intelligence are not mere goods that may be sold, or with which you may trade.

"The contract which annexed us to Germany is null and void. A contract is only valid when the two contractants had an entire freedom to sign it. France was not free when she signed such a contract. Therefore our electors want us to say that we con-

sider ourselves as not bound by such a treaty, they want us to affirm once more our right of posing of ourselves."

I beg to call the attention of the reader to two sentences of this protestation:

"Europe cannot allow a people to be seized like a flock of sheep," wrote the deputies in 1871. "People are not mere goods which may be sold or with which you may trade," proclaimed the deputies of 1874. Now you will find, nearly word for word, the same thought expressed in the message of President Wilson to Congress, when he wrote: "The right exists anywhere to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property."

That right does not exist, and it is because that right was outrageously violated in 1871 that France wants Alsace-Lorraine to come back to her. It is because, in 1871, Right has been wronged that to-day Right must be reinstated.

Why a Referendum?

Some people have spoken of a referendum. Why a referendum? Was there any referendum in 1871? And how could there be a referendum? How could you include in this referendum the hundreds of thousands of Alsations who have fled from German domination? How could you exclude from this referendum the hundreds of thousands of Germans who have come to Alsace?

The referendum was rendered by Mulhouse in 1798. Will that town be obliged to vote again? And how many times will it be obliged to vote for France? The referendum was rendered by the whole of Alsace and Lorraine in 1871 and 1874, by their elected deputies when they unanimously protested against the German annexation.

It was rendered twenty years ago by the census which was taken by the Germans themselves in Alsace. According to that census, in 1895, notwithstanding the fact that the teaching of French was prohibited in the public schools, there were 160,000 people in Alsace speaking French. And five years later, in 1900, according to another census there were 200,000 people in Alsace speaking French. And of these 200,000 people, there were more than 52,000 children.

The referendum was also rendered by Alsations who, before this war, engaged themselves in the French Army, and became officers. According to the official statistics of the French War Department, there were in 1914 145 French Army 20 generals, 145 superiors

400 ordinary officers of Alsatian origin. On the other side, in the German Army in 1914, there were 4 officers of Alsatian origin. And finally the referendum was rendered one year before the present war, in 1913, when Herr von Jagow, then Prefect of Police in Berlin, made the following extraordinary declaration: "We Germans are obliged in peace to behave ourselves as if we were in an enemy's country. . . ." What better referendum could you wish than such an admission from a German statesman?

An International Question

Moreover, the question of Alsace-Lorraine is not only a French question, but also an international question. It is not only France who has sworn to herself to recover Alsace-Lorraine—it is all the Allies who have sworn to France that she should recover it.

"We mean to stand by the French democracy to the death," solemnly declared Mr. Lloyd George on the 5th of January, 1918, "in demand they make for a reconsideration of the great wrong of 1871, when, without any regard to the wishes of the population, two French provinces were torn from the side of France and incorporated in the German Empire."

And, three days later, using nearly the same words, President Wilson, in his luminous message to Congress, said: "*The wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871, in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.*"

All the statesmen who have spoken since the beginning of the war in the name of the Allied Powers have attested that this war is not only a struggle for the liberty of nations and the respect due to nationalities, but also an effort toward definite peace. These words only appeared fit for stirring up the enthusiasm of the crowds, and fortifying their will of sacrifice, because they gave expression to their feelings and prayers. If they are forgotten by those who uttered them, they will be remembered by those who heard and treasured them.

In September, 1914, Winston Churchill said: "We want this war to remodel the map of Europe according to the principle of nationalities, and the real wish of the people living in the contested territories. After so much bloodshed we wish for a peace which will erase the scars, and restore the integrity of nations. Let us have done with the armaments,

the fear of strain, intrigues, and the perpetual threat of the horrible present crisis. Let us make the regulation of European conflicts just and natural." The French republic, of one mind with the Allies, proclaimed through its authorized representatives that this war is a war of deliverance. "France," said Mr. Stephen Pichon, Foreign Minister, "will not lay down arms before having shattered Prussian militarism, so as to be able to rebuild on a basis of justice a regenerated Europe." And Mr. Paul Deschanel, the President of the Chamber, continued: "The French are not only defending their soil, their homes, the tombs of their ancestors, their sacred memories, their ideal works of art and faith and all the graceful, just, and beautiful things their genius has lavished forth: they are defending, too, the respect of treaties, the independence of Europe, and human freedom. We want to know if all the effort of conscience during centuries will lead to its slavery, if millions of men are to be taken, given up, herded at the other side of a frontier and condemned to fight for their conquerors and masters against their country, their families, and their brothers. . . . The world wishes to live at last, Europe to breathe, and the nations mean to dispose freely of themselves."

Deroulède's Testament

These engagements will be kept. But they will have been kept only when Alsace-Lorraine—the Belgium of 1871, as Rabbi Stephen Wise has called it—has been returned to France. Then, and only then, will there be real peace. Then, and only then, will the "Testament" of Paul Deroulède have been executed:

When our war victorious is o'er,
And our country has won back its rank,
Then with the evils war brings in its train
Will disappear the hatred the conqueror trails.

Then our great France, full of love without spite
Sowing fresh springing-corn 'neath her new-born
laurels,
Will welcome Work, father of Fortune,
And sing Peace, mother of lengthy deeds.

Then will come Peace, calm, serene, and awful,
Crushing down arms, but upholding intellect;
For we shall stand out as just-hearted conquerors,
Only taking back what was robbed from us.

And our nation, weary of mournings,
Will soothe the living while praising the dead,
And nevermore will we hear the name of battle
And our children shall learn to unlearn hate.

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